

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2973

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 22025

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, CB, TH

SUBJ: SANTA BARBARA CHURCH REQUEST

REF: STATE 221331

1. EMBASSY IS FAMILIAR WITH GENE EDWARDS AND DAVID JAUCHEN, THE AUTHORS OF THE TELEGRAM REFERRED TO IN STATE REFTEL. THEY ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "CHURCH IN SANTA BARBARA," WHICH THEY HAVE DESCRIBED AS AN OFFSHOOT OF VARIOUS CHRISTIAN CHURCHES ESTABLISHED IN ASIA IN THE LAST CENTURY. EDWARDS IS THE AUTHOR OF A BOOK CALLED "THE EARLY CHURCH." SUBJECTS, PARTICULARLY DVAID JAUCHEN, HAVE BEEN TRAVELING AROUND THAILAND IN RECENT MONTHS ATTEMPTING TO ASSIST FELLOW CHRISTIAN REFUGEES TO GO TO THE UNITED STATES UNDER THE REFUGEE PROGRAM.

2. IN LATE AUGUST, WHILE CONOFF AND INS OFFICER WERE TRAVELING TO KHMER REFUGEE CAMP IN TRAD AND CHANTABURI PROVINCES, THEIR EMBASSY VEHICLE BROKE DOWN THREE TIMES, IT WAS EDWARDS AND JAUCHEN WHO TOOK THESE OFFICIALS TO THE VARIOUS CAMPS THEY WISHED TO VISIT FOR THREE DAYS WHILE THE EMBASSY CAR WAS BEING REPAIRED, AND PROVIDED OTHER ASSISTANCE. WE HAVE NO REASON TO SUSPECT EDWARDS AND JAUCHEN OF ANYTHING BUT HUMANITARIAN MOTIVES.

3. THE ACCOUNT OF CAMP DEATHS IN PARAGRAPH 1 OF REFTEL APPARENTLY REFERS TO THE EVENT IN THE CAMP AT
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PONG NAM RON, CHANTABURI ON AUGUST 16, IN WHICH, BY EMBASSY'S

BEST EVALUATION, SEVERAL UNARMED CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN THE CAMP WERE SHOT TO DEATH BY THAI AUTHORITIES. THAI PRESS INITIALLY CARRIED STORY THAT TWO OPPOSING CAMBODIAN GROUPS IN THE CAMP KILLED EACH OTHER, A VERSION ALMOST NO ONE TOOK SERIOUSLY. DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOVERNOR OF CHANTABURI, BUNCHUAI SISARAKHAM, WITH DEPUTY DISTRICT OFFICER OF NEIGHBORING MAKHAM DISTRICT PRAVIT ANGSAK, AND THE REFUGEES THEMSELVES INDICATE THAT APPROXIMATELY THIRTEEN REFUGEES WERE KILLED AS THE CULMINATION OF A PROTEST AGAINST OR CONFRONTATION WITH THAI AUTHORITIES. ONLY FOUR DEATHS WERE REPORTED IN THE PRESS. THE REASONS GIVEN FOR THE PROTEST AND THE SHOOTING VARY. ONE REASON FOR THE PROTEST WAS APPARENTLY THE INADEQUATE RICE RATIONS (ADMITTED PRIVATELY BY THE THAI OFFICIALS); ANOTHER WAS THE RIGHT OF REFUGEES TO WORK OUTSIDE TO EARN MONEY (ONE SOURCE CLAIMED SEVERAL REFUGEES HAD BEEN ARRESTED BECAUSE THEY WENT OUTSIDE TO WORK). HOWEVER, FROM OUR VISITS TO THE CAMP, IT IS APPARENT THAT A NUMBER OF REFUGEES DO WORK IN THE FIELDS OUTSIDE, BUT WE UNDERSTAND FROM THE REFUGEES THAT THERE IS A "FEE" TO BE PAID TO THE THAI AUTHORITIES BY ANYONE WISHING TO LEAVE THE CAMP TEMPORARILY. A SECOND ISSUE, DISCREETLY STATED IN THE BANGKOK POST AUGUST 18, WAS THE DEMAND THAT "THAI AUTHORITIES NOT BE PERMITTED TO INSPECT THE CAMP AT NIGHT." THIS WAS INTERPRETED AS AN ALLUSION TO THE STATEMENTS MADE (AND CONFIRMED BY PRAVIT AND REFUGEES) THAT THAI AUTHORITIES WERE TAKING SEXUAL

ADVANTAGE OF CAMBODIAN WOMEN REFUGEES IN THE CAMP.

4. IN CONVERSATION WITH ONE OF OUR POLITICAL ASSISTANTS, GOVERNOR BUNCHUAI COMPLAINED THAT THE REFUGEES HAD ORGANIZED PROTESTS, PUT UP ANTI-THAI AUTHORITY POSTERS, AND ULTIMATELY, ONE STAMPED HIS FOOT IN FRONT OF AN ARMED THAI GUARD, WHICH ACT SUFFICIENTLY ENRAGED THE LATTER TO CAUSE HIM TO SHOOT. (GOVERNOR DID NOT PRIVATELY DEFEND STORY EARLIER ATTRIBUTED TO HIM THAT CAMBODIANS SHOT ONE ANOTHER.)

5. EMBASSY REFUGEE OFFICIALS HAVE DISCUSSED THIS MATTER AT LENGTH WITH JAUCHEN AND EDWARDS, WHO REQUESTED PAROLE FOR THE CHRISTIAN REFUGEES OF THE CAMP BECAUSE THEY FELT CONFIDENTIAL

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THEM TO BE IN PARTICULAR DANGER BECAUSE OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION BY THE THAIS (A VERY RARE OCCURENCE IN THAILAND). HOWEVER, WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONFIRM THE THEORY THAT THE SHOOTINGS WERE ACTS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION, ALTHOUGH SOME CHRISTIANS WERE KILLED. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THE CHRISTIANS ARE THREATENED BY COMMUNISTS, ALTHOUGH THE LOCAL DISTRICT OFFICER THERE HAS BEEN INTERROGATING REFUGEES HE FELT MIGHT BE KHMER

ROUGES. (POST IS UNCERTAIN WHETHER THE DISTRICT OFFICER COULD DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A COMMUNIST AND SOMEONE PROTESTING POOR CAMP CONDITIONS.) JAUCHEN AND EDWARDS ALSO CLAIMED THAT OTHER REFUGEES WERE TAKEN FROM THE CAMP, SHOT, AND BURIED IN THE JUNGLE; WE CANNOT CONFIRM THIS CLAIM. ONE CHRISTIAN DID TELL US HE FELT ENDANGERED BECAUSE HE WAS A CHRISTIAN, BUT DID NOT ELABORATE.

6. REFUGEE OFFICE OF THE EMBASSY WROTE TO CHURCH IN SANTA BARBARA, AND ALSO EXPLAINED INFORMALLY TO THEM THAT THE CHRISTIAN REFUGEES THEY WISHED TO SPONSOR DID NOT FALL INTO THE CATEGORIES I OR II FOR PAROLE, AND THAT THE HIGH-RISK NUMBERS UNDER THE 3,800 ALLOCATION HAD BEEN EXHAUSTED AT THAT POINT.

7. SOME OF SUBJECT CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN APPROVED FOR PAROLE UNDER OCTOBER 4 ALLOCATION AS "CASES OF SIGNIFICANT HUMANITARIAN MERIT", AND OTHER CHRISTIANS AS "REFUGEES WITH PERSONAL EMINENCE OR ACCOMPLISHMENTS..."

8. WE WISH TO POINT OUT, HOWEVER, THAT "CASES OF SIGNIFICANT HUMANITARIAN MERIT" ARE SO MANY, AND THE NUMBERS AVAILABLE FOR PERSONS IN THAT CATEGORY SO FEW, THAT IT IS A QUALIFICATION WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO USE VERY LITTLE FOR PURPOSES OF PAROLE.

9. THE REFUGEES ASKED THE INTERVIEWING CONOFF NOT TO REVEAL THE STORY OF THE KILLINGS TO ANYONE, EVEN OFFICIAL AMERICANS, AS THEY HAD BEEN THREATENED WITH PUNISHMENT BY THE THAIS IF THEY SPOKE ABOUT THE INCIDENT. PLEASE USE CAUTION IN REVEALING THE CONTENTS OF THIS MESSAGE.

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